

Washington, D.C. — Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7), a former 3-Star Admiral, released the following statement on passage of the Conference Report to H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act. The bill will now be referred to the President for his signature, who has stated he would veto the measure:

"I fully supported this supplemental because it changes the strategy in Iraq and ensures that America will be more secure. Although it lacks a date certain, which I have strongly advocated for, this compromise is a significant step forward.

The bill says that if the president is unable to report significant progress by July 1 on the benchmarks he laid out in his State of the Union address, then redeployment must begin Oct. 1 with the goal of having all the troops out within 180 days (April 2008).

Setting a goal for redeployment will serve as the necessary leverage to have the Iraqis accept the reality of the personal consequence of not assuming responsibility for their nation. A date when Iraqis will know that they can no longer rely on the culture of dependency and that their leaders must be responsible for their own country is when they will step up to the plate and make the difficult political compromises that will stop the civil war we are currently refereeing and bring about stability.

I saw this in Iraq this month, when I visited with Senator Chuck Hagel, where both senior military and political leaders with whom we met said that the debate on the United States redeploying had made the Iraqis more willing to accept responsibilities.

A goal for redeployment will also change regional nations incentives', particularly Syria's and Iran's, toward stability when the United States is no longer in the midst of the civil war, and these nations will have to bear the consequences of further strife, with refugee flows to their countries, and the possibility that these relatively allied nations could then be joined into a proxy battle to their detriment, as one is primarily Sunni and the other Shia.

Everything I saw in Iraq – even with the enhanced military security I witnessed in the Anbar province – underscored the need to set a goal for US redeployment. Even in Anbar province, as

the Sunnis come closer together to fight insurgents' violence, there is no political entity of trust within Baghdad for them to tie into. The Ministries are still the bastion of those who narrowly define the national interest in terms of the power they can acquire and the fiefdoms they can establish through the Ministries. It is a zero-sum grab for power, as the US continues to provide the security and political cover as they go about their personal ambitions. It was also evident in the violence in Baghdad. The number of incidents and Iraqi deaths have gone down in the city since the surge, but we were told that the Iraqis were not leading the fight, as evidenced by the increased American deaths. Second, the real question was where had the fighters gone and when would they return after the surge? It was obvious that only by pursuing a national political agenda will the government leaders be able to provide an end-state of stability without the US, and that this can only be done with the leverage of redeployment by which they know we will no longer be shouldering the bulk of the political, economic, and military burden in Iraq.

I remain strongly concerned that we are currently involved in an inconclusive, open-ended involvement within a country where the long term benefits do not match what we need to reap. There is another strategy to bring about a stable Iraq, one where we will not be in Iraq and where we can begin to address our other security concerns that have been negatively impacted abroad and at home by our involvement in Iraq.

This is why this vote on the supplemental was so important. It changes the dynamics because it moves us forward to a different strategy that will help us go where we need to go. It begins a true exit strategy, so we can begin to apply our resources elsewhere in the world: where terrorists are and where emerging nations, such as in the Western Pacific, have growing political and economic interests, and therefore influence, that may challenge ours.

The Conference Report to H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act, passed the House of Representatives and now awaits action by the President.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. □ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking*

*former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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